THE Folly of Atheism,

And (what is now called) *DEISM*;
Even with Respect to the *Present Life*.

A

SERMON

Preached in the

Church of S^t. *Martin in the Fields*,
March the VII. 169½.
Being the *First* of the Lecture Founded by
the Honourable *ROBERT BOYLE*, Esquire.

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EDWARD, Lord Bishop of *Worcester*.

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To my moſt Honoured Patrons,
TRUSTEES appointed by the Will of the
Honourable *ROBERT BOYLE*, Eſq;

The Right Reverend Father in God, *Thomas*,
Lord Biſhop of *Lincoln*.
Sir *Henry Aſhurſt*, K^t and Baronet.
Sir *John Rotheram*, Serjeant at Law.
John Evelyn, ſenior, Eſquire.

Moſt Honoured,

GOD *having diſpoſed the Heart of that incomparable Perſon, the Honourable* Robert Boyle, *Eſquire, lately deceaſed, the Glory of our Nation and Age, whoſe Charity and Goodneſs were as univerſal as his Learning and Fame*; 'To ſettle an Annual 'Salary for ſome Divine or Preaching Mini-'ſter, who ſhall be enjoyned to perform the 'Offices following: 1. To preach Eight Ser-'mons in the Year, for proving the Chriſtian 'Religion againſt notorious Infidels, viz. *A-'theiſts, Deiſts, Pagans, Jews and Mahometans*;

'not deſcending to any Controverſies that are 'among Chriſtians themſelves: Theſe Le-'ctures to be on the *Firſt Monday* of the re-'ſpective Months of *January*, *February*, *March*, '*April*, *May*, *September*, *October*, *November*; in 'ſuch Church as the Truſtees ſhall from 'time to time appoint: 2. To be aſſiſting 'to all Companies, and encouraging them 'in any Undertaking for propagating the 'Chriſtian Religion: 3. To be ready to 'ſatisfie ſuch Real Scruples as any may 'have concerning thoſe Matters; and to an-'ſwer ſuch New Objections or Difficulties 'as may be ſtated, to which good Anſwers 'have not yet been made: *You have been plea-ſed to believe me able in ſome meaſure to per-form theſe Offices, and to command this Firſt Eſſay to be made publick. I am very ſenſible of the great Honour, as well as the great Ex-tent and Difficulty of the Task; and ſhall endea-vour to the utmoſt of my poor ability to anſwer the religious and generous Deſign of that Excel-lent Perſon, and the good Opinion you have en-tertained of,*

My moſt Honoured Patrons,

Your very obliged and humble Servant,

R. Bentley.

THE
Folly of Atheiſm, &c.

Pſalm XIV. verſ. 1.

The Fool hath ſaid in his Heart, There is no God; they are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.

I Shall not now make any enquiry about the time and occaſion and other circumſtances of compoſing this *Pſalm*: nor how it comes to paſs, that with very little variation we have it twice over, both here the 14th. and again number the 53d. Not that theſe and ſuch like are not important conſiderations in themſelves; but that I think them improper now, when we are to argue and expoſtulate with ſuch perſons, as allow no Divine Authority to our Text; and profeſs no greater, or, it may be they will ſay, leſs Veneration for theſe Sacred Hymns, than for the profane Songs of *Anacreon* or *Horace*. So that although I my ſelf do really believe, that all ſuch as *ſay in their Hearts, There is no God*, are *fooliſh* and *corrupt*, both in Underſtanding and Will; becauſe I ſee that infinite

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Wiſdom himſelf has pronounced them to be ſo: nevertheleſs this Argument would at preſent have no force upon theſe men, till in due time and method we have evinced the ſufficient Authority of Holy Scripture. But however there are other Books extant, which they muſt needs allow of as proper Evidence; even the mighty Volumes of viſible Nature, and the everlaſting Tables of Right Reaſon; wherein, if they do not wilfully ſhut their eyes, they may read their own Folly written by the Finger of God in a much plainer and more terrible Sentence, than *Belſhazzar*'s was by the Hand upon the Wall.

Dan. 5. 5.

And as the impious Principles of theſe perſons do preclude any argumentation from the Revealed Word of God: ſo they prevent us alſo from ſpeaking at preſent to the ſecond part of the *Text*. The whole verſe hath apparently two propoſitions; the one denoting the *Folly* of Atheiſm, *The Fool hath ſaid in his Heart, There is no God*: the ſecond declaring the *Corruption* and *Flagitiouſneſs* of Life that naturally attend it, *They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.* Now this latter part to a genuine Atheiſt is mere *Jargon*, as they love to call it; an empty ſound of words without any ſignification. He allows no Natural Morality, nor any other diſtinction of Good and Evil, Juſt and Unjuſt; than as Human Inſtitution and

and the modes and faſhions of various Countries do denominate them. The moſt Heroical Actions or deteſtable Villainies are in the nature of the things indifferent to his approbation; if by ſecrecy they are alike conceal'd from Rewards or Puniſhments, from Ignominy or Applauſe. So that till we have proved in its proper place the eternal and eſſential Difference between Vertue and Vice, we muſt forbear to urge Atheiſts with the *Corruption* and *Abominableneſs* of their Principles. But I preſume, the firſt part of the Text, the *Folly and ſottiſhneſs of Atheiſm* (which ſhall be the ſubject of this Diſcourſe) will be allowed to come home to their caſe; ſince they make ſuch a noiſy pretence to Wit and Sagacity: and I believe ſeveral of them firſt engage in that Labyrinth of Nonſence and Folly out of an abſurd and prepoſterous affectation of ſeeming Wiſer than their Neighbours.

But before I proceed any farther, it will be neceſſary to clear and vindicate this expreſſion of the *Pſalmiſt*, *The Fool hath ſaid in his Heart*, *There is no God*. For I know not any Interpreters, that will allow it to be ſpoken of ſuch, as *flatly deny* the Being of God; but of them that believing his Exiſtence, do yet ſeclude him from directing the Affairs of the World, from obſerving and judging the Actions of Men. I ſuppoſe they might be induced to this, from

from the commonly received notion of an Innate Idea of God, imprinted upon every Soul of Man at their Creation, in Characters that can never be defaced. Whence it will follow, that Speculative Atheism doth subsist only in *our* Speculation; whereas really Human Nature cannot be guilty of the crime: that indeed a few sensual and voluptuous Persons may for a season eclipse this native Light of the Soul; but can never so wholly smother and extinguish it, but that at some lucid intervals it will recover it self again, and shine forth to the conviction of their Conscience. And therefore they believed, that the words would not admit of a strict and rigorous interpretation; but ought to be so temper'd and accommodated to the nature of things, as that they may describe those profane persons; who though they *do not, nor cannot* really doubt *in their hearts* of the *Being* of God, yet do openly deny his *Providence* in the course of their Lives. Now if this be all that is meant by the *Text*, I do not see how we can defend not only the fitness and propriety, but the very truth of the expression. As to that natural and indelible signature of God, which Human Souls in their first Origin are supposed to be stamp'd with, I shall shew at a fitter opportunity, that it is a mistake, and that we have no need of it in our Disputes against Atheism. So that being free from that prejudice, I interpret

terpret the words of the *Text* in the literal acceptation, which will likewise take in the Expositions of others. For I believe that the Royal Psalmist in this comprehensive brevity of speech, *There is no God*, hath concluded all the various Forms of Impiety; whether of such as excludes the Deity from governing the World by his Providence, or judging it by his Righteousness, or creating it by his Wisdom and Power. Because the consequence and result of *all* these Opinions is terminated in down-right Atheism. For the Divine inspection into the affairs of the World doth necessarily follow from the Nature and Being of God. And he that denies this, doth implicitly deny his Existence: he may acknowledge what he will with his mouth, but *in his heart he hath said, There is no God. A God, therefore a Providence*; was a general argument of vertuous men, and not peculiar to the *Stoicks* alone. And again, *No Providence, therefore no God*; was the most plausible reason, and the most frequent in the mouths of Atheistical men. So that it seems to be agreed on all hands, that the Existence of God and his Government of the World do mutually suppose and imply one another.

There are some Infidels among us, that not only disbelieve the *Christian* Religion; but impugn the assertion of a *Providence*, of the *Immortality* of the

Soul, of an Univerſal *Judgment* to come, and of any *Incorporeal* Eſſence: and yet to avoid the odious name of *Atheiſts*, would ſhelter and skreen themſelves under a new one of *Deiſts*, which is not quite ſo obnoxious. But I think the *Text* hath cut them ſhort, and precluded this ſubterfuge; in as much as it hath declared, that all ſuch wicked Principles are coincident and all one in the iſſue with the rankeſt Atheiſm: *The Fool*, that doth exempt the affairs of the World from the ordination and diſpoſal of God, *hath ſaid in his heart, There is no God* at all. It was the opinion of many of the Ancients, that *Epicurus* introduced a *Deity* into his Philoſophy, not becauſe he was perſuaded of his Exiſtence, (for when he had brought him upon the Stage of Nature, he made him only *Muta perſona*, and interdicted him from bearing any Part in it,) but purely that he might not incurr the offence of the Government. Wherefore he was generally ſuſpected *Verbis reliquiſſe Deum, re ſuſtuliſſe*; to have framed on purpoſe ſuch a contemptible paultry *Hypotheſis* about him, as indeed left the Name and Title of God in the World; but nothing of his Nature and Power. Juſt as a Philoſopher of our own age gave a ludicrous and fictitious notion about the *Reſt of the Earth*, to evade the hard cenſure and uſage, which *Galileo* had lately met with. For my own part, as I do not ex-

Poſidon. apud *Ciceron.* *Plutarch.* &c.

Mr. *Des. Cartes.*

exclude this reaſon from being a grand occaſion of *Epicurus*'s Deiſm; ſo I believe that He and *Democritus* too were compelled to it likewiſe by the neceſſity of their own Syſtems. For ſeeing they explain'd the Phænomena of *Viſion*, *Imagination*, and *Thought* it ſelf, by certain thin fleeces of Atoms, that flow inceſſantly from the ſurfaces of bodies, and by their ſubtilty and fineneſs do penetrate any obſtacle, and yet retain the exact figures and lineaments of the ſeveral bodies from which they proceed; and in this manner inſinuating themſelves into the Eyes, and the Contexture of the Soul, do there produce and excite Senſation and Perception of themſelves: in conſequence therefore of this *Hypotheſis* they were obliged to maintain that we could have no Phantaſie, Idea or Conception of any thing, but what did really ſubſiſt either intire or in its ſeveral parts. Whence it followed, that mankind could have no imagination of *Jupiter* or *Mars*, of *Minerva* or *Iſis*; if there were not actually ſuch Beings in nature to emit thoſe *Effluvia*, which gliding into the Soul muſt beget ſuch an imagination. And thence it was, that thoſe Philoſophers adapted their deſcription of the Deity to the vulgar apprehenſions of thoſe times; Gods and Goddeſſes innumerable, and all of human figure: becauſe otherwiſe the conceptions of mankind about them could not poſſibly be accounted

for from their Phyſiology. So that if *Epicurus* and *Democritus* were in earneſt about their Philoſophy, they did neceſſarily and really believe the *Exiſtence of the Gods*. But as to the nature and authority of them, they bereaved that *Jupiter* of his Thunder and Majeſty, forbidding him to look or peep abroad, ſo much as to enquire what News in the Infinite Space about him; but to content himſelf and be happy with an eternal lazineſs and dozing, unleſs ſome rambling Troops of *Atoms* upon the diſſolution of a neighbouring World might chance to awake him. Now becauſe no *Iſraelite* in the days of the *Pſalmiſt* is likely to have been ſo curious about natural Knowledge, as to believe the Being of God for ſuch a quaint and airy reaſon as this, when he had once boldly denied his Dominion over the World; and ſeeing that there is not now one Infidel living, ſo ridiculous as to pretend to ſolve the Phænomena of *Sight*, *Fancy* or *Cogitation* by thoſe fleeting ſuperficial films of bodies: I muſt beg leave to think that the *Fool in the Text* was a thorough confirmed *Atheiſt*; and that the modern diſguiſed *Deiſts* do only call themſelves ſo for the former reaſon of *Epicurus*, to decline the publick odium and reſentment of the Magiſtrate; and do cover the moſt arrant Atheiſm under the mask and ſhadow of a Deity, by which they underſtand no more than

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ſome eternal inanimate Matter, ſome univerſal Nature, and Soul of the World, void of all ſenſe and cogitation, endued with none at all, much leſs with Infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs; and therefore in this preſent Diſcourſe they may deſervedly come under that Character which the Text hath given of them, of *Fools that have ſaid in their Hearts, There is no God.*

And now having thus far cleared our way; in the next place we ſhall offer ſome notorious Proofs of the groſs *Folly* and ſtupidity of Atheiſts.

If a Perſon that had a fair Eſtate in reverſion, which in all probability he would ſpeedily be poſſeſs'd of, and of which he might reaſonably promiſe to himſelf a long and happy Enjoyment, ſhould be aſſured by ſome skilfull Phyſician; that in a very ſhort time he would inevitably fall into a Diſeaſe, that would ſo totally deprive him of his Underſtanding and Memory, that he ſhould loſe the knowledge of all things without him, nay all conſciouſneſs and ſence of his own Perſon and Being: If, I ſay, upon a certain belief of this indication, the man ſhould appear over-joyed at the News, and be mightily tranſported with the diſcovery and expectation; would not all that ſaw him be aſtoniſhed at ſuch behaviour? Would they not be forward to conclude that the Diſtemper had ſeized him already, and that

that even then the miſerable Creature was become a mere *Fool* and an Idiot? Now the Carriage of our *Atheiſts* or *Deiſts* is infinitely more amazing than this; no dotage ſo infatuate, no phrenſie ſo extravagant as theirs. They have been educated in a *Religion*, that inſtructed them in the knowledge of a *Supreme Being*; a Spirit moſt excellently glorious, ſuperlatively Powerfull and Wiſe and Good, Creator of all things out of nothing; That hath endued the Sons of Men, his peculiar Favorites, with a Rational Spirit, and hath placed them as Spectators in this noble Theatre of the World, to view and applaud theſe glorious Scenes of Earth and Heaven, the workmanſhip of his hands; That hath furniſhed them in general with a ſufficient ſtore of all things, either neceſſary or convenient for life; and particularly to ſuch as fear and obey him, hath promiſed a ſupply of all wants, a deliverance and protection from dangers: *That they that ſeek him, ſhall want no manner of thing that is good.* And beſides his munificence to them in this life; He *ſo loved the world, that he ſent his Onely-begotten Son*, the expreſs Image of his Subſtance, and Partaker of his eternal Nature and Glory, to *bring life and Immortality to light*, and to tender them to Mankind upon fair and gracious Terms; That if they ſubmitted to his *eaſie yoke and light burthen*, and obſerved his Commandments *which*

Pſ. 34. 9.

Joh. 3. 16.

2 Tim. 1. 10.

Matt. 11. 30.

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are not grievous, He then gave them *the promiſe of eternal Salvation*; He had *reſerved for them in Heaven an Inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*; He had *prepared* for them an unſpeakable, unconceivable Perfection of Joy and Bliſs, *things that eye had not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entred into the heart of man.* What a delightfull and raviſhing *Hypotheſis* of Religion is this? And in this Religion they have had their Education. Now let us ſuppoſe ſome great Profeſſor in Atheiſm to ſuggeſt to ſome of theſe; That all this is a mere dream and impoſture; that there is no ſuch excellent Being, as they ſuppoſe, that created and preſerves them; that all about them is dark ſenſeleſs Matter, driven on by the blind impulſes of Fatality and Fortune; that men firſt ſprung up, like Muſhroms, out of the mud and ſlime of the Earth; and that all their Thoughts, and the whole of what they call Soul, are only various Action and Repercuſſion of ſmall particles of Matter, kept a-while a moving by ſome Mechaniſm and Clock-work, which finally ceaſes and periſhes by death. If it be true then (as we daily find it is) that they liſten with complacency to theſe horrid Suggeſtions; if they let go their hope of Everlaſting Life with willingneſs and joy; if they entertain the thoughts of final Perdition with exultation and triumph; ought they not to be eſteem'd moſt notori-

1 Joh. 5. 3. Heb. 5. 9. 1 Pet. 1. 4. 1 Cor. 2. 9.

Ἄθεον καὶ ἄλογον καὶ ἀναίσθητον γένος. Max.Tyr. *Diss.* 1. 2 Tim. 4. 8. Jam. 1. 12. 2 Cor. 4. 17.

notorious *Fools*, even destitute of common sence, and abandon'd to a callousness and numbness of Soul?

What then, is Heaven it self with its *pleasures for evermore* to be parted with so unconcernedly? Is a *Crown of Righteousness*, a *Crown of Life*, to be surrendred with laughter? Is an *exceeding and eternal weight of Glory* too light in the balance against the hopeless death of the Atheist, and utter extinction? 'Twas a noble saying of the Emperor *Marcus*, That he would not endure to live one day in the world, if he did not believe it to be under the government of Providence. Let us but imagin that excellent Person confuted and satisfied by some *Epicurean* of his time; that all was but *Atoms*, and *Vacuum*, and *Necessity*, and *Chance*. Would He have been so pleased and delighted with the conviction? would He have so triumph'd in being overcome? or rather, as he hath told us, would he not have gone down with sorrow and despair to the grave? Did I but once see an Atheist lament and bewail himself; That upon a strict and impartial examination he had found to his cost, that all was a mistake; that the Prerogative of Human Nature was vanished and gone; those glorious hopes of Immortality and Bliss, nothing but cheating Joys and pleasant Delusions; that he had undone himself by losing the comfortable Error,

Error, and would give all the World to have better arguments for Religion: there would be great hopes of prevailing upon ſuch an Atheiſt as this. But, alas! there are none of them of this temper of mind; there are none that *underſtand and ſeek after God*; they have *no knowledge*, nor any deſire of inſtruction; they *thruſt the Word of God from them, and judge themſelves unworthy of everlaſting life*; they willingly preferr Darkneſs before Light; and obſtinately chooſe to periſh for ever in the Grave, rather than be Heirs of Salvation in the Reſurrection of the Juſt. Theſe certainly are the *Fools* in the Text, indocil, intractable Fools, whoſe ſtolidity can baffle all arguments, and is proof againſt Demonſtration it ſelf; *whoſe end* (as the words of St. *Paul* do truly deſcribe them) *whoſe end is deſtruction*, an eternal Deprivation of Being; *whoſe God is their belly*, the gratification of ſenſual Luſts; *whoſe Glory is in their ſhame*, in the debaſing and villainizing of Mankind to the condition of Beaſts; *who mind earthly things*, who if (like that great Apoſtle) they were *caught up to the third Heaven*, would (as the Spies did of *Canaan*) *bring down an evil report* of thoſe Regions of Bliſs. And I fear, unleſs it pleaſe God by extraordinary methods *to help their unbelief, and enlighten the eyes of their underſtanding*; they will carry their Atheiſm with them to the Pit, and the flames of Hell only muſt convince them of their Error.

v. 2. of this Pſalm. ver. 4. Act. 13. 46. Phil. 3. 19. 2 Cor. 12. 2. Num. 13. 32. Mar. 9. 24. Eph. 1. 19.

This supine and inconsiderate behaviour of the Atheists is so extremely absurd, that it would be deem'd incredible, if it did not occurr to our daily Observation; it proclaims aloud, that they are not led astray by their Reasoning, but led captive by their Lusts to the denial of God. When the very pleasures of Paradise are contemn'd and trampled on, like Pearls cast before Swine; there's small hope of reclaiming them by arguments of Reason. But however as *Solomon* adviseth, we will answer these *Fools not according to their Folly, lest we also be like unto them.* It is expedient that we *put to silence the ignorance of these foolish men*, that Believers may be the more confirmed and more resolute in the Faith.

Prov. 26. 4.

Did Religion bestow Heaven without any terms or conditions indifferently upon all; if the *Crown of Life* was hereditary, and free to Good and Bad; and not settled by Covenant upon the Elect of God only, such as *live soberly and righteously and godly in this present World*, I believe there would be no such thing as an Infidel among us. And without controversie, 'tis the Way and Means of attaining to Heaven, that makes profane Scorners so willingly let go the Expectation of it. 'Tis not the Articles of the Creed, but the Duty to God and their Neighbour, that is such an inconsistent incredible Legend. They will not practise the Rules of Religion, and therefore they

Tit. 2. 12.

they cannot believe the Promiſes and Rewards of it.

But however let us ſuppoſe them to have acted like rational and ſerious Men: and perhaps upon a diligent inquiſition they have found, that the Hope of Immortality deſerves to be *joyfully* quitted, and that either out of *Intereſt* or *Neceſſity* which is both.

I. And firſt, One may conceive indeed, how there might poſſibly be a *neceſſity* of quitting it. It might be tied to ſuch Terms, as would render it impoſſible ever to be obtain'd. For example, if it ſhould be required of all the Candidates of Glory and Immortality, to give a full and knowing Aſſent to ſuch things as are repugnant to Common Senſe, as contradict the κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι, the univerſal Notions and indubitable Maxims of Reaſon; if they were to believe, that One and the ſame Thing may *be* and *not be* at the ſame time and in the ſame reſpect; If allowing the received Idea's and denominations of Numbers and Figures and Body, they muſt ſeriouſly affirm, that Two and two do make a Dozen, or that the Diameter of a Circle is as long as the Circumference, or that *the ſame Body may be all of it in diſtant places at once.* I muſt confeſs that the offers of Happineſs upon ſuch Articles of Belief as theſe, would be mere tantalizing of Rational Creatures; and the Kingdom of Heaven would become the Inheritance of only Idiots and Fools. For whilſt a man of Com-

mon Capacity doth think and reflect upon ſuch Propoſitions; he cannot poſſibly bribe his Underſtanding to give a Verdict for their Truth. So that he would be quite fruſtrated of the Hope of Reward, upon ſuch unpracticable Conditions as theſe: neither could he have any evidence of the Reality of the Promiſe, ſuperior to what he is conſcious to of the Falſity of the Means. Now if any Atheiſt can ſhew me in the Syſtem of Chriſtian Religion any ſuch abſurdities and repugnancies to our natural Faculties; I will either evince them to be Interpolations and Corruptions of the Faith, or yield my ſelf a Captive and a Proſelyte to his Infidelity.

II. Or, 2dly, they may think 'tis the *Intereſt* of Mankind, that there ſhould be no Heaven at all; becauſe the Labour to acquire it is more worth than the Purchaſe: God Almighty (if there be one) having much overvalued the Bleſſings of his Preſence. So that upon a fair eſtimation, 'tis a greater advantage to take one's ſwing in Senſuality, and have a glut of Voluptuouſneſs in this life, freely reſigning all pretences to future Happineſs, (which, when a man is once extinguiſh'd by Death, he cannot be ſuppoſed either to want or deſire) than to be tied up by Commandments and Rules ſo thwart and contrary to Fleſh and Blood; to *take up one's Croſs, to deny himſelf*, and refuſe the Satisfaction of Natu-

Mark 8. 34.

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ral Deſires. This indeed is the true Language of Atheiſm, and the Cauſe of it too. Were not this at the bottom, no man in his wits could contemn and ridicule the expectation of Immortality. Now what power or influence can Religion have upon the minds of theſe men; while not only their Affections and Luſts, but their ſuppoſed Intereſt ſhall plead againſt it? But if we can once ſilence this powerfull Advocate, we ſhall without much difficulty carry the Cauſe at the Bar of impartial Reaſon.

Now here is a notorious inſtance of the *Folly* of Atheiſts, that while they repudiate all Title to the Kingdom of Heaven, merely for the preſent Pleaſure of Body, and their boaſted Tranquillity of Mind; beſides the extreme madneſs in runing ſuch a deſperate Hazard after Death, (which I will not now treat of) they unwittingly deprive themſelves here of that very Pleaſure and Tranquillity they ſeek for. For I ſhall now endeavour to ſhew, That Religion it ſelf gives us the greateſt Delights and Advantages even in this Life alſo, though there ſhould prove in the event to be no Reſurrection to another. *Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.* Prov. 3. 17.

But before I begin that, I muſt occurr to one ſpecious Objection both againſt this Propoſition and the paſt part of my diſcourſe; Namely, that Religi-

Religion doth perpetually haunt and diſquiet us with diſmal apprehenſions of everlaſting Burnings in Hell; and that there is no ſhelter nor refuge from thoſe Fears, but behind the Principles of Atheiſm.

(1.) Firſt therefore I will freely acknowledge to the Atheiſts; that ſome part of what hath been ſaid is not directly concluſive againſt them; if they ſay, that before they revolted from the Faith, they had ſinned away all expectation of ever arriving at Heaven: and conſequently had good reaſon ſo *joyfully* to receive the news of Annihilation by Death, as an advantageous change for the everlaſting torments of the Damn'd. But becauſe I cannot expect, that they will make ſuch a ſhameleſs and ſenſeleſs Confeſſion, and ſupply us with that invincible argument againſt themſelves: I muſt ſay again, that to preferr final Extinction before a happy Immortality does declare the moſt deplorable ſtupidity of mind. Nay although they ſhould confeſs, that they believed themſelves to be Reprobates, before they disbelieved Religion; and took Atheiſm as a ſanctuary and refuge from the Terrors of Hell; yet ſtill the imputation of *Folly* will ſtick upon them: in as much as they choſe Atheiſm as an Opiate to ſtill thoſe frightening Apprehenſions, by inducing a dulneſs and lethargy of mind; rather than to make uſe of that active and ſalutary medicine, a hearty

hearty Repentance; that they did not know the *Riches of the goodneſs and forbearance and long-ſuffering of God*, and that a ſincere Amendment of Life, was never too late nor in vain; *Jeſus Chriſt being the Saviour of all men*, and a *propitiation for the ſins of the whole world*: *who came into the world to ſave ſinners, even the chief of them all*; *and died for the ungodly, and his bittereſt enemies*. Rom. 2. 4. 1 Tim. 4. 10. 1 John 5. 14. 1 Tim. 1. 15. Rom. 5. 6, 10.

(2.) And ſecondly, As to the *Fears of Damnation*; thoſe Terrors are not to be charged upon Religion it ſelf, which proceed either from the Want of Religion, or Superſtitious miſtakes about it. For as an honeſt and innocent Man doth know the puniſhments, which the Laws of his Country denounce againſt Felons and Murtherers and Traytors, without being terrified or concern'd at them: So a Chriſtian in truth as well as in name, though he believe the conſuming Vengeance prepared for the diſobedient and unbelievers, is not at all diſmayed at the apprehenſions of it. Indeed it adds ſpurs, and gives wings to his diligence, it excites him to *work out his Salvation with fear and trembling*; a religious and ingenuous fear, that is temper'd with hope and with love and unſpeakable joy. But he knows, that if he fears him who is *able to deſtroy both ſoul and body in Hell*, he needs not fear that his own ſoul or body ſhall ever go thither. Phil. 2. 12. Matt. 10. 28.

I allow

I allow that some debauched and profligate Wretches, or some designing perfidious Hypocrites, that are religious in outward profession, but *corrupt and abominable* in their works, are most justly as well as usually liable to these horrours of mind. 'Tis not my business to defend or excuse such as these; I must leave them, as long as they keep their *hardness and impenitent Hearts*, to those gnawing and excruciating Fears, those whips of the Divine *Nemesis*, that frequently scourge even Atheists themselves: For they also can never wholly extinguish these horrible forboadings of Conscience. A thousand occasions do awake the sleeping Tormentors. Any slight Consideration either of themselves, or of any thing without; whatsoever they think on, or whatsoever they look on; all do administer some reasons for suspicion and diffidence, lest possibly they may be in the wrong; and then 'tis a *fearfull thing to fall into the hands of the living God*: *There are they in great fear*, as 'tis in the 5th. verse of this *Psalm*, under terrible presages of *judgment and fiery indignation.* Neither can they say, That these Terrors, like Tales about Spectres, may disturb some small Pretenders and puny Novices, but dare not approach the *vere Adepti*, the Masters and Rabbies of Atheism. For 'tis well known both from ancient and modern Experience, that the very boldest of them out of their

Heb. 10. 31.

Heb. 10. 27.

Cic. Plutarch &c

their Debauches and Company, when they chance to be ſurpriſed with Solitude or Sickneſs, are the moſt ſuſpicious and timorous and deſpondent Wretches in the world: and that the boaſted Happy Atheiſt in the Indolence of body, and an undiſturbed Calm and Serenity of mind, is altogether as rare a Creature, as the *Vir Sapiens* was among the *Stoicks*; whom they often met with in Idea and Deſcription, in Harangues and in Books, but freely own'd that he never had or was like to exiſt actually in Nature.

And now as to the preſent advantages, which we owe to *Religion*, they are very conſpicuous; whether we conſider Mankind (1.) *Separately*, or (2.) under *Society* and *Government*.

1. And firſt, in a *Single Capacity*. How is a good Chriſtian animated and cheer'd by a ſtedfaſt belief of the Promiſes of the Goſpel; of an everlaſting enjoyment of perfect Felicity, ſuch as after millions of millions of Ages is ſtill youthfull and flouriſhing and inviting as at the firſt? no wrinkles in the face, no gray hairs on the head of Eternity; no end, no diminution, no ſatiety of thoſe delights. What a warm and vigorous influence does a Religious heart feel from a firm expectation of theſe Glories? Certainly this Hope alone is of ineſtimable value; 'tis a kind of anticipation and

pledge of those Joys; and at least gives him one Heaven upon Earth, though the other should prove a Delusion. Now what are the mighty promises of Atheism? let us know the glorious Recompences it proposeth; Utter Extinction and Cessation of Being; to be reduced to the same condition, as if we never had been born. O dismal reward of Infidelity! at which Nature does shrink and shiver with horror. What some of the * Learnedest Doctors among the *Jews* have esteem'd the most dreadfull of all Punishment, and have assigned for the portion of the blackest Criminals of the Damn'd; so interpreting *Tophet*, *Abaddon*, *the Vale of Slaughter* and the like, for final Excision and Deprivation of Being: this Atheism exhibits to us, as an Equivalent to Heaven. We all know what hath been disputed among Schoolmen to this effect. And 'tis an observation of *Plutarch*, that the Generality of mankind πάντες ἐν πᾶσι, as well Women as Men, chose rather to endure all the Punishments of Hell, as described by the Poets; than part with the Hope of Immortality, though immortal only in misery, I easily grant, that this would be a very hard Bargain; and that *Not to be at all*, is more eligible, than *to be miserable always*: our Saviour himself having determin'd the question; *Wo to that man, by whom the Son of Man is betrayed; good were*

* *Vide* Pocockii *Notas ad Portam* Mosis, *p.* 158, *&c.*

Plutarc. Ὅτι ἐν ζῶν, &c. *p.* 1104, 1105. *Ed.* Rnald.

Mark 14. 2.

were it for that man, if he had never been born. But however thus much it evidently ſhews, That this deſire of Exiſtence is a natural Affection of the Soul; 'tis *Self-preſervation* in the higheſt and trueſt meaning; 'tis interwoven in the very Frame and Conſtitution of Man. How then can the Atheiſt reflect on his own *Hypotheſis* without extreme ſorrow and dejection of Spirit? Will he ſay, that when once he is dead, this Deſire will be nothing; and that he that is not, cannot lament his Annihilation? So indeed it will be according to his Principles. But notwithſtanding, while he continues in Life (which we now ſpeak of) this dusky Scene of Horror, this melancholy Proſpect of final Perdition will frequently occurr to his Fancy; the ſweeteſt Enjoyments of Life will often become flat and inſipid, will be damp'd and extinguiſh'd, be bitter'd and poiſon'd by the malignant and venomous quality of this Opinion.

Is it not more comfortable to a Man, to think well of himſelf, to have a high Value and Conceit of the Dignity of his Nature, to believe a noble Origination of his Race, the Off-ſpring and Image of the great King of Glory: rather than that men firſt proceeded, as Vermin are thought to do, by the ſole influence of the Sun out of Dirt and Putrefaction?

Is it not a firmer foundation for Contentment

and Tranquillity, to believe that All things were at firſt created, and are continually order'd and diſpoſed for the Beſt, and that principally for the Benefit and Pleaſure of Man; than that the whole Univerſe is mere bungling and blundering; no Art or Contrivance to be ſeen in't; nothing effected for any purpoſe and deſign; but all ill-favouredly cobled and jumbled together by the unguided agitation and rude ſhuffles of Matter?

Can any man wiſh a better Support under affliction, than the Friendſhip and Favour of Omnipotence, of Infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs; who is both able, and willing, and knows how to relieve him? Such a man *can do all things through Chriſt that ſtrengtheneth him*, he can patiently ſuffer all things with cheerfull ſubmiſſion and reſignation to the Divine Will. He has a ſecret Spring of ſpiritual Joy, and the continual Feaſt of a good Conſcience within, that forbid him to be miſerable. But what a forlorn deſtitute Creature is the Atheiſt in Diſtreſs? He hath no friend in Extremity, but Poiſon or a Dagger or a Halter or a Precipice. A violent Death is the laſt refuge of the *Epicureans*, as well as the *Stoicks*. This, ſays *Lucretius*, is the diſtinguiſhing Character of a genuine Son of our Sect, that he will not endure to live in Exile and Want and Diſgrace, out of a vain fear of death; but

Philip. 4. 13.

Lib. 3.

diſpatch

diſpatch himſelf reſolutely into the State of eternal Sleep and Inſenſibility. And yet for all this ſwaggering, not one of a hundred hath boldneſs enough to follow the Direction. The baſe and degenerous Saying of one of them is very well known; * That *Life* is always *ſweet*, and he ſhould ſtill deſire to prolong it; though after he had been maim'd and diſtorted by the Rack, he ſhould laſtly be condemn'd to hang on a Gibbet.

* Mecænas *apud* Senec. *Ep.* 101. *Debilem facito Manu; debilem pede coxa: &c.*

And then, as to the *Practical Rules* and Duties of Religion: as the Miracles of our Lord are peculiarly eminent above the *Lying Wonders* of *Dæmons*, in that they were not made out of vain Oſtentation of Power, and to raiſe unprofitable Amazement; but for the real Benefit and Advantage of men, by feeding the Hungry, healing all ſorts of Diſeaſes, ejecting of Devils, and reviving the Dead: ſo likewiſe the Commands which he hath impoſed on his Followers are not like the abſurd Ceremonies of *Pagan* Idolatry, the frivolous Rites of their Initiations and Worſhip, that might look like Incantation and Magick, but had no tendency in their Nature to make Mankind the happier. Our Saviour hath enjoyn'd us a *Reaſonable ſervice*; accommodated to the rational part of our Nature. All his Laws are in themſelves, abſtracted from any Conſideration of Recompence, conducible to the Temporal Intereſt of them

Rom. 12. 1.

that

that obſerve them. For what can be more availing to a man's Health, or his Credit, or Eſtate, or Security in this world, than Charity and Meekneſs, than Sobriety and Temperance, than Honeſty and Diligence in his Calling? Do not Pride and Arrogance infallibly meet with Contempt? Do not Contentiouſneſs and Cruelty and Study of Revenge ſeldom fail of Retaliation? Are not Envious and Covetous, Diſcontented and Anxious minds tormenters to themſelves? Do not we ſee, that Slothfull and Intemperate and incontinent perſons deſtroy their Bodies with diſeaſes, their Reputations with diſgrace, and their Families with want? Are Adultery and Fornication forbidden only by *Moſes* and *Chriſt*? or do not *Heathen* Law-givers puniſh ſuch Enormities with Fines, or Impriſonment, with Exile, or Death? 'Twas an objection of *Julian* the Apoſtate; that there were no new Precepts of Morality in our Religion: *Thou ſhalt not kill, Thou ſhalt not ſteal, Thou ſhalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.* Why all the World, ſays he, is agreed about theſe Commandments: and in every Country under Heaven, there are Laws and Penalties made to enforce all the Ten, excepting only the *Sabbath* and *the Worſhip of ſtrange Gods.* We can anſwer *him* another way; but he may make our Infidels aſhamed to complain of thoſe Ordinances as hard Impoſitions, which the ſenſe of all Nations has thought

Julianus *apud* Cyrillum, *p.* 134.

thought to be reasonable: which not only the Philosophers of *Greece* and *Italy* and the ancient World; but the Banyans of *Mogul*, the Talapoins of *Siam*, the Mandarins of *China*, the Moralists of *Peru* and *Mexico*, all the Wisdom of Mankind have declared to be necessary Duties. Nay if the Atheists would but live up to the Ethicks of *Epicurus* himself, they would make few or no Proselytes from the Christian Religion. None revolt from the Faith for such things, as are thought peculiar to Christianity; Not because they must *love and pray for their enemies*, but because they must not poison or stab them: not because they must not *look upon a Woman to lust after her*, but because they are much more restrain'd from the Perpetration of their Lusts. If wanton glances and libidinous thoughts had been permitted by the Gospel, they would have apostatized nevertheless. This we may conjecture from what *Plato* and others have told us, that it was commonly ἀκρασίαν ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν, their immoderate Affections and Lusts, that in the very times of Paganism induced men to be Atheists. It seems their impure and brutal Sensuality was too much confined by the Religion of *those* Countries, where even *Venus* and *Bacchus* had their Temples. Let not therefore voluptuous Atheists lay all the fault of their Sins upon the Infirmity of Human Nature; nor plead that Flesh and Blood

Matth. 5. 44.

ver. 28.

Plato *de Legib. lib.* 10. *p.* 886. *Ed.* Step.

cannot

cannot reſiſt thoſe Temptations, which have all their force and prevalence from long Cuſtom and inveterated Habit. What enticement, what pleaſure is there in common profane Swearing? yet neither the fear of God nor of the Law will perſuade men to leave it. 'Tis prevailing Example that hath now made it faſhionable, but it hath not always been ſo, nor will be hereafter. So other Epidemical Vices, they are riſe and predominant only for a ſeaſon, and muſt not be aſcribed to Human Nature in the Lump. In ſome Countries Intemperance is a neceſſary part of Converſation; in others Sobriety is a Vertue Univerſal, without any reſpect to the Duties of Religion. Nor can they ſay, that this is only the difference of Climate, that inclines one Nation to Concupiſcence and Senſual Pleaſures; another to Blood-thirſtineſs and Deſire of Revenge. It would diſcover great ignorance in Hiſtory, not to know that in all Climates a whole People has been over-run with ſome recently invented or newly imported kind of Vice, which their Grandfathers never knew. In the lateſt Accounts of the Country of *Guiana*, we are told that the eating of Humane Fleſh is the beloved pleaſure of thoſe Savages: two Nations of them by mutual devouring are reduced to two handfulls of men. When the Goſpel of our Saviour was preached to them, they received it with gladneſs

gladneſs of heart; they could be brought to forgo Plurality of Wives; though that be the main impediment to the converſion of the *Eaſt-Indies*. But the great Stumbling-block with theſe *Americans*, and the only Rock of Offence was the forbidding them *to eat their Enemies*: That irreſiſtable Temptation made them quickly to revolt and relapſe into their Infidelity. What, muſt we impute this to the temperature of the Air, to the nature of the Soil, to the influence of the Stars? Are theſe *Barbarians* of man-eating Conſtitutions, that they ſo hanker after this Diet, which we cannot imagin without horror? Is not the ſame thing practiſed in other parts of that Continent? Was it not ſo in *Europe* of old, and is it not now ſo in *Africa*? If an Eleventh Commandment had been given, *Thou ſhalt not eat Human fleſh*; would not theſe Canibals have eſteem'd it more difficult than all the Ten? And would not they have really had as much reaſon as our Atheiſts, to plead the power of the Temptation, and the propenſity of Fleſh and Blood? how impudent are they then, that traduce the eaſie and gracious Conditions of the Goſpel for Unreaſonable and Tyrannical Impoſitions? *Are not God's ways equal*, O ye Children of Deſtruction, *and are not your ways unequal?*

II. Secondly and laſtly, As to the benign Influence of Religion upon *Communities* and Governments,

habemus confitentes Reos; 'tis ſo apparent and unqueſtionable, that 'tis one of the wiſe Objections of the Atheiſt, That it firſt was contrived and introduced by Politicians to bring the wild and ſtragling Herds of Mankind under Subjection and Laws. *Out of thy own mouth ſhalt thou be judged, thou wicked ſervant.* Luk. 19. 22.

Thou ſay'ſt that the wiſe Inſtitutors of Government, Souls elevated above the ordinary pitch of men, thought Religion neceſſary to Civil Obedience. Why then doſt thou endeavour to undermine this foundation, to undo this Cement of Society, and to reduce all once again to thy imaginary State of Nature and Original Confuſion? No Community ever was or can be begun or maintain'd, but upon the Baſis of Religion. What Government can be imagin'd without Judicial Proceedings? and what methods of Judicature without a Religious Oath; which implies and ſuppoſes an Omniſcient Being, as conſcious to its falſhood or truth, and a revenger of Perjury? So that the very nature of an Oath (and therefore of Society alſo) is ſubverted by the Atheiſt; who profeſſeth to acknowledge nothing ſuperiour to himſelf, no omnipreſent obſerver of the actions of men. For an *Atheiſt to compoſe a *Syſtem* of *Politicks* is as abſurd and ridiculous, as *Epicurus*'s Sermons were about † *Sanctity* and *Religious Worſhip*. But there was hope, that the Doctrine of abſolute uncon-

*Hobbes *de Cive, Leviathan.*

† Περὶ ὁσιότητος, Laert. *De ſanctitate & de pietate adverſus Deos.* Cic.

uncontroulable Power and the formidable name of *Leviathan* might flatter and bribe the Government into a *toleration of Infidelity*. We need have no recourſe to notion and ſuppoſition; we have ſad experience and convincing example before us, what a rare Conſtitution of Government may be had in a whole Nation of Atheiſts. The Natives of *Newfoundland* and *New France* in *America*, as they are *ſaid* to live without any ſenſe of Religion, ſo they are *known* to be deſtitute of its advantages and bleſſings; without any Law or form of Community; without any Literature or Sciences or Arts; no Towns, no fixed Habitations, no Agriculture, no Navigation. And 'tis entirely owing to the power of Religion, that the whole World is not at this time as barbarous as they. And yet I ought not to have called theſe miſerable Wretches *a Nation of Atheiſts*. They cannot be ſaid to be of the Atheiſt's opinion; becauſe they have no opinion at all in the matter: They do not ſay in their hearts, *There is no God*; for they never once deliberated, if there was one or no. They no more *deny* the Exiſtence of a Deity; than they deny the *Antipodes*, the *Copernican Syſtem*, or the *Satellites Jovis*: about which they have had no notion nor conception at all. 'Tis the *Ignorance* of thoſe poor Creatures, and not their *Impiety*: *their* Ignorance as much to be pitied, as the Impiety of the *Atheiſts* is to be

De Laet. *p.* 34, 47, 50. *Voyage du Sieur de Champlain. p.* 28, & 93.

deteſted and puniſh'd. 'Tis of mighty importance to the Government, to put ſome timely ſtop to the ſpreading Contagion of this *Peſtilence that walketh by day*, that dares to diſperſe its curſed ſeeds and principles in the face of the Sun. The *Fool* in the Text had only ſaid *in his heart, There is no God*: he had not ſpoken it aloud, nor openly blaſphem'd in places of publick reſort. There's too much reaſon to fear, that ſome of all orders of men, even Magiſtracy it ſelf, have taken the Infection: a thing of dreadfull conſequence and moſt imminent danger. *Epicurus* was *not a little* wiſer than ordinary, when he ſo earneſtly adviſed his Diſciples againſt medling in publick affairs; He knew the nature and tendency of his own Philoſophy; that it would ſoon become ſuſpected and odious to a Government, if ever Atheiſts were employed in places of Truſt. But becauſe he had made one great Rule ſuperior to all, *That every man's only Good was pleaſure of Body and contentment of Mind*: hence is was that men of ambitious and turbulent Spirits, that were diſſatisfied and uneaſie with Privacy and Retirement, were allowed by his own Principle to engage in matters of State. And there they generally met with that fortune, which their Maſter foreſaw. Several Cities of *Greece* that had made experiment of them in Publick Concerns, drove them out, as Incendiaries and Peſts of Commonweals, by

Plutarch. Λάθε βιώσας. Lucr. &c.

Plutarch. Ὅτι οὐ καλῶς ζῶσιν. Cic. &c.

by ſevere Edicts and Proclamations. Atheiſm is by no means tolerable in the moſt private condition: but if it aſpire to authority and power; if it acquire the Command of an Army or a Navy; if it get upon the Bench or into the Senate, or on a Throne: what then can be expected, but the baſeſt Cowardiſe and Treachery, but the fouleſt prevarication in Juſtice, but betraying and ſelling the Rights and Liberties of a People, but arbitrary Government and tyrannical Oppreſſion? Nay if Atheiſm were once, as I may ſay, the National Religion; it would make its own Followers the moſt miſerable of men; it would be the Kingdom of Satan divided againſt it ſelf; and the Land would be ſoon brought to deſolation. *Joſephus*, that knew them, hath inform'd us, that the Sadducees, thoſe Epicureans among the Jews, were not only rough and cruel to men of a different Sect from their own; but perfidious and inhumane one towards another. This is the genuine ſpirit and the natural product of Atheiſm. No man, that adheres to that narrow and ſelfiſh Principle, can ever be Juſt or Generous or Gratefull; * unleſs he be ſometime overcome by Good-nature and a happy Conſtitution. No Atheiſt, as ſuch, can be a true Friend, an affectionate Relation, or a loyal Subject. The appearance and ſhew of mutual Amity among them, is wholly owing to the

Joſephus *de Bello Judaico, l.2.c.12.*

* *Si ſibi ipſe conſentiat, & non interdum naturæ bonitate vincatur.* Cic. *de Offic.* l. 2.

the smallness of their number, and to the obligations of a Faction. 'Tis like the Friendship of Pick-pockets and High-way Men, that are said to observe strict Justice among themselves, and never to defraud a Comrade of his share of the Booty. But if we could imagin a whole Nation to be Cut-purses and Robbers; would there then be kept that square-dealing and equity in such a monstrous *den of Thieves*? And if Atheism should be supposed to become universal in this Nation (which seems to be design'd and endeavour'd, though we know the gates of Hell shall not be able to prevail) farewell all Ties of Friendship and Principles of Honour; all Love for our Country and Loyalty to our Prince; nay, farewell all Government and Society it self, all Professions and Arts, and Conveniences of Life, all that is laudable or valuable in the world.

And now having in the first place explained the Words of the *Text*, and secondly detected the mere *Deists* of our Age to be no better than disguised *Atheists* (seeing they have now no pretence to the Deism of *Epicurus*;) and afterwards having shown, that willingly to entertain the *Hypothesis of Atheism* (which is literally *to choose Death and Evil, before Life and Good*, and *to love Darkness rather than Light*) is the most absurd and inconsiderate *Folly*; and that there is nothing to excuse so silly a Choice: Not

Deut. 30. 15. Joh. 3. 10.

any

any *Neceſſity* of it; for Religion doth not impoſe any Articles of Faith that are repugnant to our Faculties, and incredible to Natural Reaſon: Not *Intereſt*; becauſe Religion it ſelf is even in this Preſent Life the trueſt and beſt Intereſt as well of every *ſingle Perſon* (for a Chriſtian's Belief is the moſt comfortable, and his Hope the moſt glorious of all Men's, and the Practical Duties he is obliged to, are in themſelves agreeable to his Nature, and conducible to his Temporal Happineſs) as of *Communities and Governments*; becauſe Religion is not only uſefull to Civil Society, but fundamentally neceſſary to its very Birth and Conſtitution: Having, I ſay, competently proved theſe Particulars, as far as the uſual brevity of ſuch Diſcourſes will allow; I ſhall conclude all with one ſhort Reflection, That if *Atheiſm* or modern *Deiſm* be evinced to be *Folly*, how great muſt that *Folly* be? It muſt not be bare *Folly*, but *Madneſs* and *Diſtraction*. Nor do we need to recurr to the *Stoical* Paradox, *That all Fools are mad*; Nor to that Saying of one of their own Party, who (not out of Deriſion, as ſome would have it, but out of Complement to the Publick) call'd it *Inſanientem ſapientiam*, the *Mad* Philoſophy of Atheiſm. For ſo ſottiſhly to loſe the pureſt Pleaſures and Comforts of *this* World, and forego the expectation of Immortality

tality in *another*; and so desperately to run the Risk of *dwelling with everlasting Burnings*, it plainly discovers it self to be what it is; it is manifestly the most pernicious *Folly* and deplorable *Madness* in the World.

May the Father of Mercies and God of Infinite Wisdom reduce the Foolish *from their Errors, and make them* wise unto Salvation; *Confirm the Sceptical and wavering Minds, and so prevent Us, that stand fast, in all our doings, and further us with his continual help,* that we may not be of them that draw back unto Perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the Soul. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

Preface, *p. ult. l.* 14. for *stated*, read *started.*